

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 1417

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TAGS: MOPS, PERP, PEOR, LE, SY, IS, PLO
SUBJ: POLITICAL ASPECTS OF ISRAELI ATTACK IN SOUTH LEBANON

1. SUMMARY: IN VIEW OF PHALANGE POLITICAL BUREAU MEMBER KARIM PAKRADOUNI, ISRAELI OBJECTIVES IN ATTACKING SOUTH LEBANON MARCH 15 ARE TO ESTABLISH "CORDON SANITAIRE" ALONG BORDER, AND TO DEFLECT ATTENTION OF UPCOMING MEETINGS BETWEEN PRESIDENT CARTER AND PRIME MINISTER BEGIN FROM ESSENTIAL ISSUES OF MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS. SYRIANS CAN TOLERATE ISRAELI INVASION PROVIDED CERTAIN SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHIC AND TIME LIMITS ARE OBSERVED. LEBANESE FRONT MILITIA WILL CONFINE THEIR REACTION TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL HAYMAKING. PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP MAY SEEK CONTACT GOL LEADERSHIP TO ARRANGE ELEMENTS OF A NEW PALESTINIAN-LEBANESE MODUS VIDENDI.
END SUMMARY

2. EMBOFF HAD SEVERAL TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS MARCH 15-16 WITH KARIM PAKRADOUNI, PHALANGE POLITICAL BUREAU MEMBER WHO IS WELL TIED IN WITH GOL, SARG, AND LEBANESE FRONT LEADERSHIPS. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF HIS ANALYSIS OF THE NEW POLITICAL SITUATION CREATED BY THE ISRAELI INVASION OF SOUTH LEBANON AS FOLLOWS:

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3. ISRAELI INTENTIONS. PAKRADOUNI NOTES THAT IN COURSE OF ISRAELI OPERATIONS ON MARCH 15 AS WELL AS ISRAELI LEADERSHIP STATEMENTS, ORIGINAL PRETEXT OF RETALIATION FOR MARCH 11 PALESTINIAN RAID INTO ISRAEL QUICKLY WAS SUPERCEDED BY ISRAELI INTENT TO ESTABLISH WITH ITS OWN TROOPS A BORDER BUFFER ZONE. THIS HAS BEEN LONG-STANDING ISRAELI OBJECTIVE, WHICH THEY HAVE SOUGHT UNSUCCESSFULLY TO ACHIEVE CONSISTENTLY OVER LAST YEAR-

AND-A-HALF USING CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN THE SOUTH. AS OF EARLY MARCH 16, PAKRADOUNI HAD IMPRESSION ISRAELIS INTENDED TO STAY ON LEBANESE TERRITORY IN THE SOUTH FOR A LONG TIME.

4. THE LIMITS OF SYRIAN TOLERATION. IN PAKRADOUNI'S VIEW, SYRIANS WILL NOT REPEAT NOT FEEL COMPELLED TO RESPOND TO ISRAELI INVASION PROVIDED ISRAELIS OBSERVE FOLLOWING CONDITIONS;

(A) GEOGRAPHIC LIMITS. IF ISRAELIS DO NOT GO BEYOND SOUTH LEBANON AREA AND ONCE OCCUPIED AREA IS ESTABLISHED THERE IS NO FURTHER EXPANSION OF IT, AND NO SYRIAN MILITARY POSITION, AS SUCH, IS ATTACKED DIRECTLY BY THE ISRAELIS, SYRIANS WILL NOT ENTER FRAY.

(B) TIME LIMIT OF COMBAT OPERATIONS. SYRIANS CAN ACCEPT ISRAELI MILITARY OPERATIONS WHICH ESSENTIALLY COMPLETED WITHIN ONE-TWO DAYS, BUT, SHOULD ACTUAL FIGHTING DRAG ON FOR SEVERAL DAYS OR A WEEK, POLITICAL PRESSURES ON SYRIA MAY MOUNT TO POINT WHERE THEY WOULD FEEL COMPELLED TO JOIN IN SUPPORT OF THE PALESTINIANS.

(C) TIME LIMIT OF OCCUPATION. SYRIANS WILL BE ABLE TO ACCEPT PHYSICAL ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF AREA SEIZED MARCH 15 FOR A LONGER PERIOD OF TIME, EVEN MORE THAN ONE WEEK. BEYOND THAT, PAKRADOUNI WAS UNCERTAIN, BUT HE FELT THAT AT SOME POINT EVEN A RELATIVELY PEACEFUL OCCUPATION WOULD BECOME INTOLERABLE TO THE SYRIANS.

5. PAKRADOUNI DESCRIBED THESE PARAMETERS AS THE "NATURAL LIMITS"
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OF THE ISRAELI INVASION. HE SAID SYRIAN FORCES ON BOTH SIDES OF BEIRUT HAD APPEARED THROUGHOUT MARCH 15 TO BE QUITE RELAXED, WHICH WAS INDICATIVE OF OFFICIAL SYRIAN ATTITUDES.

6. LEBANESE FRONT REACTIONS. PAKRADOUNI, WHO HAS BEEN CONSTANTLY IN TOUCH WITH VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF LEBANESE FRONT AND ATTENDED IMPROMPTU MEETING OF PHALANGE POLITICAL BUREAU LATE MARCH 15, SAID THAT IT NOT REPEAT NOT LIKELY THAT HARDLINE MILITIA ELEMENTS, LED BY BACHIR GEMAYEL, WOULD SEEK TO EXPLOIT SITUATION TO HAVE ANOTHER ROUND, A LA FAYYADIYAH, WITH THE SYRIANS. HE TOOK PARTICULAR NOTE OF ISRAELI LEADERSHIP STATEMENTS MARCH 15, THAT CHRISTIAN FIGHTING ELEMENTS IN SOUTH LED BY MAJOR HADDAD WERE NOT PARTICIPATING IN ISRAELI OPERATIONS, AS DOVETAILING NICELY WITH LEBANESE FRONT INCLINATIONS IN BEIRUT. HE SAID HE HAD HEARD THERE WOULD BE SOME EFFORTS TO "MOBILIZE" CHRISTIAN REFUGEES FROM DAMOUR LIVING IN BEIRUT AROUND THE THEME THAT THEY MUST BE PREPARED TO "LIBERATE" DAMOUR, BUT DID NOT EXPECT THAT ANY MILITARY ACTIONS WOULD BE ATTEMPTED TO ACHIEVE THAT AIM.

7. PALESTINIAN-LEBANESE GOVERNMENT CONTACTS. PAKRADOUNI SAID HE SAW, SO FAR, NO INDICATIONS THAT GOL WOULD UNDERTAKE TO GET IN

TOUCH WITH PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP IN PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES.
PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP HOWEVER MIGHT WELL TAKE INITIATIVE TO
TALK TO GOVERNMENT LEADERS (SUCH AS PRIME MINISTER HOSS) TO
BEGIN EFFORT TO MOVE TOWARDS SOME NEW MUTUAL UNDERSTANDINGS.

8. COMMENT: PERHAPS MOST SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT OF PAKRADOUNI'S
ANALYSIS IS HIS SIGNIFICANT ELEMENT OF PAKRADOUNI'S ANALYSIS IS
HIS CONFIDENCE THAT BOTH THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT AND THE
LEBANESE FRONT, ALBEIT FROM QUITE DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES,
CAN LIVE WITH WHAT ISRAELIS SO FAR HAVE DONE. SYRIAN RESTRAINT
HAS ITS LIMITS, HOWEVER, PARTICULARLY SHOULD COMBAT OPERATIONS
CONTINUE FOR MANY MORE DAYS. ISRAELI OPERATION, NEVERTHELESS,
IN HIS VIEW IS CLEARLY ABOVE AND BEYOND INITIAL PRETEXT OF
RETALIATION FOR MARCH 11 PALESTINIAN RAID IN ISRAEL, AND
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ENCOMPASSES BOTH LONG-SOUGHT-AFTER ISRAELI GOALS IN SOUTH
LEBANON AND SYSTEMATIC EFFORT TO DETOUR U.S. EFFORTS TO
ACHIEVE REGIONAL OVERALL SETTLEMENT.
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